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HIGH PROFILE

A CASE(Y) FOR THE CIA

When President Reagan named William J. Casey to head the Central Intelligence Agency, most observers agreed it was an excellent choice. But it was much more than a political payoff to a valued campaign operative.

True, Casey had been chairman of the Reagan-for-President Committee, coming into that post at a critical time just after the Iowa primary in February 1980. But Reagan picked Casey for other reasons. One was his long experience in the federal government in a number of important posts, including chairman of the Security and Exchange Commission, under secretary of state for economic affairs, and chairman and president of the Export-Import Bank.

Casey demonstrated he knew how to run a bureaucracy. This was important to Reagan who wanted to avoid some of Carter's problems with inexperienced administrators. But primarily, Reagan picked Casey because of his long association with the intelligence apparatus of the United States.

The president not only gave Casey the title of CIA director, but also gave him cabinet rank. No other head of the CIA had this status. Clearly, Reagan wants to boost the morale of the CIA and raise it in the eyes of Americans and the rest of the world. But he also wants Casey's advice and experience to be heard at the heart of U.S. policy-making in the councils of the president's cabinet.

Casey, who is 68, jokes about his age when compared with Reagan, who is 70. "I guess the president picked me for the cabinet because he likes to have younger men around him."

When interviewed recently at his Palm Beach home on North Ocean Boulevard, Casey expressed pleasure at the president's desire to rebuild the public esteem of the CIA. There's no doubt Casey can do the job. He is a tough-minded leader with a lightning-fast intellect. His previous experience in running large bureaucracies taught him the importance of making fast decisions.

"Even if some of them occasionally turn out wrong," Casey says, "they can be changed just as quickly and it's far better to keep moving ahead instead of getting an entire organization mired down because of indecision at the top."

A national magazine recently observed that Casey does not readily abide fools or incompetents. Casey knows the CIA is the one Federal agency that can fire anyone for cause with no red tape. But this does not mean he is going to undertake a sweeping reorganization of the Agency right away. Casey told the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, which held confirmation hearings on his appointment, that he wanted to reinvigorate the Agency and reverse what he called "institutional self doubts." He said he hoped to make the Agency more effective by attracting a wide array of talented analysts and tapping the insights of the nation's scholars.

Casey also told the committee he would observe the guidelines that prohibit the use of academics, clerics and journalists as intelligence agents — a practice that drew sharp criticism from Congress in the past. But he said he intended to review such guidelines and expressed skepticism about exempting any group from employment by the In-